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Hancock Co. Library & supervisors debate financial request

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By Danielle Thomas - bin | email

HANCOCK COUNTY, MS (WLOX) - Hancock County supervisors and library officials said they are back on track after a heated exchange at a budget workshop. At issue was a letter sent from the library board of trustees to the supervisors refusing to hand over financial information after a \$1.5 million funding request from the county.



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"This shows us no respect. It shows we us don't want to work with you," said Supervisor Lisa Cowand. "Just give us the money. We're in our own little world. We're going to do what we want."

The letter from the library trustee board said there would be an undue burden on the library accountant who doesn't maintain a system to give supervisors the cash balance projection for September 30 that they want. The library board's letter also says an attorney "has advised us there is no legal basis for your request to provide detailed information such as cash balances."

However, the board of supervisors' attorney said according to the Mississippi Attorney General's office, public libraries' financial records are public information.

"Don't make us get your bank account records. Don't put this county through this and the library and this board," Cowand said. "We're trying to be good stewards of the county dollars. It's a bad budget year. We're trying to meet everybody's needs."

Library Director Patty Furr said no one can predict how much will be needed to run East Hancock County library and money is tight after opening the Pearlinton library with no additional funding. Furr said the library system had to absorb \$130,000 in costs last year.

"There have been several times when I have been desperately worried because our cash was down to such a low level," Furr said. "Now we have no money to operate the two new libraries. Basically the same budget we had year before last which operated the three libraries we originally had is the same budget we had this year. Without an increase we just don't have money to run the libraries. We have no reserves."

Supervisors said they are sure this library dispute is just a bump in the road, on the way to a compromise everyone can live with. At a second meeting later in the day, the library system supplied the documentation and supervisors said the two groups are working on a budget plan.

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